

EXL Grant Extends the Impact of Family Literacy Nights

READ4015 is a six hour course designed to introduce teacher candidates in the Elementary & Special Education licensure programs to the concepts of language and literacy. An integral component of the course is field experiences in elementary and middle schools, and this includes a concerted effort to introduce teacher candidates to the school community at large through participating in Family Literacy Nights.

Family Literacy Nights provide an avenue for the Elementary & Special Education Department to furnish support for the public schools in the areas of literacy education and family involvement. Faculty members plan and coordinate with the principals and/or literacy coaches to choose a featured book (or books) and address the specific literacy needs (phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, etc.) of their children and families. Then, under the supervision of the faculty members, MTSU teacher candidates organize, plan, and lead literacy activities which incorporate math, art, music, social studies, etc. and relate to the featured book(s). The families receive a copy of the feature book(s) for them to keep and enjoy at home as well as any materials from the activities.

In addition to fostering the importance and enjoyment of reading, these events allow the local schools to support and build community with their children's families. It is a great opportunity for the university to serve and build connections with the families and the local schools as well.

Over the past several years, READ4015 instructors have been very fortunate to partner with Read to Succeed to offer programs in both Murfreesboro City Schools and Rutherford County Schools. In fall 2012, we received a MTSU Public Service Grant which enabled the department to expand the program to five additional schools in the Rutherford County and Murfreesboro City School systems. Evaluations conducted by the school administrators, families, MTSU faculty members, and teacher candidates to assess the effectiveness of the programs have been conducted, and results are positive. Families say they enjoy the program, learn a variety of techniques to promote reading at home, and enjoy having time to share a meal and engage in activities with their children. Teacher candidates report there is improvement in their abilities to interact with family members, to plan and implement literacy activities, to model strategies, and to engage families and children in literacy learning. This program also affords teacher candidates the opportunity to work with mentors in the public schools. In addition, it is the faculty members' hope that by completing this service-learning project in local schools that the teacher candidates will begin to see that they have a responsibility to serve and give back to their community and will also be a part of planning Family Literacy Nights once they enter the teaching

profession. Classroom teachers enjoy participating in the program without having to plan and implement the activities, and school personnel emphasize the importance of interacting with families in a positive setting.

Unfortunately, Read to Succeed, one of our most valuable partners, only serves Rutherford County leaving a gap in providing opportunities for off-campus family literacy programs. Middle Tennessee State University's service area includes counties where our 2+2 Interdisciplinary Studies K-6 program is offered, and there was a real need to extend Family Literacy Nights to counties such as Maury County and Bedford County. It was decided to apply for an EXL grant which would allow the department to extend the Family Literacy Nights to other counties. In fall 2013, we were awarded an EXL grant to extend the Family Literacy Nights to additional counties in our service area to benefit those communities as well as to provide the same field experience opportunities for our 2+2 teacher candidates.

Because of the awarded EXL grant, READ4015-005 was able to partner with Marvin Wright Elementary in Maury County this semester to host a Family Literacy Night on March 6, 2014. It was a huge success with 235 students attending along with their family members. It is our hope, that with sustained support, we will be able to continue to offer Family Literacy Nights to advocate the importance of reading in all of our service counties and to support the collaboration between the university and school systems in MTSU's service area.

To learn more about Family Literacy Nights, please contact:

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